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hopes have vanished, and the two bold explorers have been put to death at Berdera, in the manner which will presently be explained to us by Colonel Playfair, Her Majesty's Consul at Zanzibar. This deplorable event has overwhelmed me with grief for the loss of a man whom I was proud to call my friend, and who, judging from the great services he had already performed, was destined, I sincerely believed, to throw great additional light on the geography of that wholly untrodden country which lies far to the south of Abyssinia. At our next anniversary meeting it will be my endeavour to do justice to the memory of the noble spirit which has fled, and in the mean time I request Colonel Playfair to state the main facts connected with this sad catastrophe."

1. *An Account of the Death of Baron C. von der Decken and Dr. Link.*

By Colonel PLAYFAIR, H. M. Consul and Political Agent at Zanzibar.

At our meeting last month we discussed the disastrous termination of Baron von der Decken's expedition up the Juba River, and speculated on the probability of his being still alive, even if a captive. I stated that in my opinion there was a *chance* that he might still be safe, though I fear that the wish was father to the thought, and that in my heart I had but little hope. Since then I have received a series of letters, dated from before the Baron entered the Juba, up to last month; one is from the Hanseatic Consul, another from Bishop Tozer, and two from the Baron himself, written in very low spirits. He detailed all the difficulties and dangers he had encountered up to his arrival at the Juba, and concluded with the melancholy expression—"Good bye; I will not say *au revoir*, for I fear there is little chance of that." He evidently did not feel very confident of success, but probably little thought that the expedition would have ended so abruptly and fatally as it has done.

I will not recapitulate what we have already heard from the Baron's own journal, and the Ritter von Schiekh's Report.\* I will only remind you that the smaller steamer was lost on the bar of the Juba, and that on the 26th of September the other steamer, the *Welf*, struck on a rock near some rapids above Berdera, about 350 miles up the river, and the party proceeded to repair the damage.

On the 28th the Baron, in company with Dr. Link, a Brava chief named Abdio, and about six native attendants, left the camp, in order to revisit Berdera; their object was to procure provisions, and to obtain information as to the route they should take after abandoning the steamer, which they believed could not again be made available.

On the 1st of October, the Baron and his party being still absent,

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\* *Vide ante*, Meeting 12th February, p. 91 *et seqq.*

a sudden attack was made on the camp, the result of which was that Trenn the artist, and an engineer named Kanter, were killed. The others were able to repulse the enemy, who (and it is important to bear this in mind) left several of their number dead on the field.

Finding their position very precarious, and getting no tidings of the Baron, the remaining members of the expedition left in a boat, pulled down to the mouth of the Juba, where they abandoned their boat, and walked along the shore till they met a native vessel, which brought them to Zanzibar. The party which escaped consisted of the Ritter von Schickh, four other Europeans, and eight negroes.

But to return to the Baron. Immediately on his arrival at Berdera he commenced to make arrangements regarding the purchase of provisions. While he was so employed, the Berdera people, knowing that the party at the steamer was much weakened, attacked it as before mentioned. The Baron soon got news of their intentions and resolved immediately to return to the camp. But he found his boat gone; Abdio, the Brava chief, refused to act as guide and no one else could be got to show him the road. He however started in company with Dr. Link and the Zanzibar negroes, leaving his property behind in charge of Abdio.

They lost their way and spent the night of Saturday, the 30th September, and Sunday, the 1st of October, in the open country. Upon this the Baron and Dr. Link consulted as to what they should do, when it was determined that the latter and one boy should still endeavour to find the camp, while the Baron with three attendants returned to Berdera. On his arrival there, the Baron appears to have given out that he had been to the steamer, and had found all safe on board; but his hearers must have known well that it was not so. The Baron resumed his negotiation for provisions, and purchased and sent off to the camp several bullocks, which, as might be expected, never reached their destination.

Abdio promised to get more provisions on the following day (Monday, the 2nd October), and on that day the Baron was summoned to have a consultation about them. He left his servants in charge of his property; and on his return he found that these, together with all the arms were gone. The servants subsequently explained that they had been called away by Abdio, and as soon as they had left the hut the muskets were removed.

On the Baron's return from the conference he demanded his muskets, but received no satisfactory reply. Shortly afterwards Abdio came in with the report that the missing boat had been found, and begged the Baron to send his men to take charge of it. As

soon as these got out of the Baron's sight, they were seized by the Berdera people and imprisoned in a mosque. In the mean time others of the Berdera people brought back the Baron's guns and laid them at his feet. He was then sitting on a native bedstead, and as he stooped to pick them up, several Somālis rushed on him, seized his arms and bound them behind his back. Abdio was not present while this was being done. In vain did the Baron beseech them to release him, promising them any sum of money they might demand; in vain did he even beg that Abdio might be sent for; his captors were deaf to his entreaties; they carried him immediately to the river, where they put him to death. Four of the Zanzibar negroes saw him taken away, but they were afraid to interfere; afterwards they saw his garments saturated with blood. His body was thrown into the Juba River.

We must now follow Dr. Link. On parting with the Baron he was attacked by a party of Somālis, but he saved himself for the time, partly by running, and partly by swimming. The boy who accompanied him swam to the steamer; and the dismay of both can better be imagined than described, at finding it abandoned by their comrades.

The Doctor found his way back to Berdera, where he arrived the day after the Baron's death. He also shared his leader's fate, and his body was thrown into the river.

The natives belonging to the expedition were detained some time in captivity; but they were subsequently released, in consequence of their being Mahommedans, and Haji Ali, the Chief of Berdera, permitted them to go to Brava. The Baron's property was divided amongst the Somālis, and the treacherous guide Abdio shared in the plunder.

There is no reason to believe that any of the other natives belonging to the expedition acted treacherously. It is probable that they deserted their master on the first appearance of danger, but this was to be expected: indeed, they could not have afforded him any material aid, the whole population of the country being against him.

We need not be at a loss to understand the motives which induced the Somālis to commit this atrocity. The valuable plunder to be obtained by the sack of the steamer would have been more than a sufficient inducement; but, doubtless, other motives also actuated them. They could not understand what object the white man had in penetrating their country, and they were naturally alarmed and suspicious. The Chief of Berdera was probably vexed at the manner in which his overtures towards reconciliation had been

received by the Baron, as stated in the Baron's own Diary, and, to crown all, they desired to avenge the death of their clansman who fell in the attack on the camp.

Had the departure of the Ritter von Schiekh with the remainder of the expedition been less precipitate, it is possible that the Doctor might have been saved: on the other hand, it is by no means improbable that these also might have been betrayed, and might have shared the Baron's fate. I do not see what can be done to avenge this atrocity: the perpetrators of it are equally beyond Seyed Mejid's reach and ours; H. H. the Sultan cannot be held responsible for what has occurred. The Baron went on this journey in opposition to his earnest remonstrance, and His Highness begged me to communicate to the Baron, that while he would give him all the aid in his power, he had no authority in that country beyond the sea-coast, and he declined to be held responsible for any disaster that might occur. This condition was explained to the Baron, who recognised the justice of it.

His Highness has now done all that lies in his power: he sent one of his secretaries in H.M.S. *Vigilant*, to act as interpreter, and supplied the officer in command with letters to all the chiefs on the coast. Captain Latham visited Brava, but he could do nothing more than obtain confirmation of the Baron's fate. H. H. has also promised to do all in his power to secure the Baron's journals, and to bring to justice the villain Abdio, who appears to have sold and betrayed him. The only thing I have yet heard in favour of Abdio—and this ought to be recorded as well as the charges against him—is that he warned the Baron against going back to Berdera, saying, that after the quarrel he had had with one of the chiefs, he would certainly be killed immediately on his return. This is probably all we shall ever know of this ill-fated expedition; perhaps the most promising and best equipped that ever attempted the exploration of Africa, and certainly the most disastrous in its untimely end.

The PRESIDENT asked Colonel Playfair whether he did not think it possible that the Sultan of Berdera had really nothing to do with the assassination of the Baron; and whether it might not have been done by a tumultuous mob of people, who had heard of their fellow countrymen at a distant part of the river being killed?

Colonel PLAYFAIR replied that it was very likely that the first attack on the camp was made by a tumultuous mob of Somālis; but he did not think that the Baron would have been assassinated without the Sultan's orders. The Sultan of Berdera was equally beyond the reach of the Sultan of Zanzibar and of the British Government. An expedition could hardly go up this unknown river a distance of 380 miles in sufficient strength to overawe the population of the country; but were it even possible for gunboats to ascend they could effect nothing, the inhabitants would simply retire till all danger

was past; and the town of Berdera is probably only a collection of mat huts, the destruction of which would give the inhabitants no concern.

The PRESIDENT said that as this was the last occasion for some time on which they would have to discuss the river Juba, he might state that there was present in the room a Mr. Angelo, an Englishman, who a number of years ago ascended the river Juba. The fact of that ascent of the river was so perfectly unknown to him (the President) and his associates in geography, that they had said that the recent exploration was the first occasion on which the Juba was ascended by Europeans. A general Gazetteer, prepared by a member of the Royal Geographical Society, to which he (the President) had referred, mentioned the river Juba as having been ascended by Mr. Angelo, but the year was not stated. Mr. Angelo would communicate to the Meeting his recollections of the river.

Mr. ANGELO read passages from his journal describing the features of the river Juba and the country lying on its banks. His exploration was made in the year 1836. He stated that at that time Berdera was occupied by runaway slaves and the lower class of Somālis. His impression was that Baron von der Decken's murder must have been committed by the lower class of Somālis. He (Mr. Angelo) had always received the greatest hospitality from the Somālis of Berdera and the other towns on the Juba.

The PRESIDENT said that it would occupy too much of the time of the meeting to hear the whole of Mr. Angelo's journal read; but the Society would be very happy to profit from it by inserting it, with Mr. Angelo's permission, in a future number of their printed Proceedings.

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## 2. *Englishmen in Captivity in Eastern Africa.* By COLONEL RIGBY.

At the last Meeting but one of the Royal Geographical Society it was stated that there is strong circumstantial evidence to show that several Englishmen have been for several years past kept in captivity by the Somāli tribes near Magdesho, on the East Coast of Africa. The circumstances connected with this subject are as follows:—

In the month of June, 1855, the British ship *St. Abbs*, from London to Bombay, struck upon the island of San Juan de Nuova. All the boats except one were swamped in launching. The remaining boat was taken by the captain, who deserted the ship with two of the crew, one a Belgian. They landed on the island, and made no attempt to render any assistance to those remaining on board. Two of the passengers, Mr. Ross and Mr. Bell, cadets in the Bombay army, jumped overboard to endeavour to swim ashore. Mr. Bell was drowned, Mr. Ross reached the shore in safety. The carpenter lowered his tools into the water in an empty cask, which reached the shore. He then swam ashore with one of the crew. The ship remained on the reef for some days, dismasted. At length, at daylight on the morning of the 14th of June, the ship had disappeared, and the persons on the reef naturally supposed that she had gone to pieces during the night. However, no bodies or por-